

Advent Sunday, November 29<sup>th</sup> 2020.  
Isaiah 64:1-9, also Mark 13:24-end

*Thanks to NT Wright. Year B pages 2-3. Twelve Months of Sundays for shaping much of this intro.*

A theologian once said: try cutting Advent out of your Bible and you'd lost half of the Old Testament and most of the New. Jesus return is mentioned over 300 times in the New Testament. Jews and Christians have, through a wide variety of ways, lived within and by the story of God's order, his rule and reign, appearing within the world's confusion, pain, sin, God's fiery light burning away the shadows. The NT in different places re-uses OT language and imagery of God's breaking into world history, not least the frequent mentions in the prophets of 'the day of the Lord'. The Day of the Lord re-used to speak of what will happen on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, that unknown time when the Son of Man will 'come in clouds with great power and glory.' And this is a hope, to be at the heart of every believer.

This is not a topic for clever theologians, or for pastors and priests to mention for a few weeks once a year.

The Church Calendar focuses us upon key areas of our discipleship, to help orientate ourselves correctly. I am glad that the Church Calendar does have a fixed point where it not only looks forward to the amazing incarnation, the journey to the birth of the King of Kings. But also, in these four weeks, reminds us that our King will return, encourages us to look forward to it, even though it is unknown exactly when.

The calendar shapes our discipleship – the importance of incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, Spirit poured out. Into that other elements such as Epiphany – means manifestation,

how Christ revealed to the world; Kingdom season – the rule and reign of Christ; and in this part of the calendar, Advent – we are reminded of this key part of our discipleship.

Paul writes to the church in Thessalonians. Only months since he had founded the church with others like Silas and Timothy. But persecution had driven them out – and after preaching in Athens, Paul was in Corinth. There he wrote to them: He tells them what he has heard about their faith – they have turned to God from the idols they worshipped, how they now worship and serve the living and true God; and how they wait for his Son – Jesus – to come from heaven. Right from the start, these young Christians, only months, first generation, Paul says – they have turned to the true and living God, they serve him and they wait for Jesus to return from heaven. His praise for them suggests, this a core desire for us. Not an add on or for extreme Christians or for certain denominations. A desire of for all of us to hold.

### **a) Desire.**

The first verse of the Isaiah reading was about Desire! ‘Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down.’ The Hebrew word for Oh! can be translated – if only! Abraham used it when he said ‘If only – Oh – that Ishmael might live before you’ Or the prophetic voice in Psalm 81, when God is saying ‘Oh, that my people would listen to me...’ Maybe it is a bit like young children waiting for Sinterklaas – if only it was tomorrow! For those watching from other countries, just google Sinterklaas and you will get it.

The prophet’s words are part of a prayer he is praying from chapter 63, v15 onwards. God responds in chapters 65 and 66 with his words.

Isaiah has been praying – being very honest with God in fact – he calls on God in heaven, on his throne, – he asks God to look down

and see their situation. He asks God – where is your zeal and your might now? Where is your tenderness, your heartfelt pity and compassion? Where are you he asks? Yet – Isaiah does not give up. He says – in this experience of God’s absence, he says : “But you are our Father... the One who sets us free, our Redeemer.” Yet the prophet knows they have sinned as a people, individually and as a nation, and God has turned his back on his people due to their sin... Yet he cries out because they are in need, the city is in ruins, he calls on God saying ‘we are yours from of old.’

Following those words, he says, to quote the Message translation: “Oh, that you would rip open the heavens and descend.’ It is a desperation, a desire, a need, a longing for God to come.

It reminds me of the book of Revelation. After the various teaching, visions, the final chapters are read of the new heaven and new earth. God will be with his people, and he will live with them – not just visit from time to time, but be there. He will bring healing – he will wipe every tear from their eyes. He will remove the old order – no more death, or mourning, or crying or pain – ‘I am making everything new’ he declares. We read about the new Jerusalem, which includes the river of the water of life, the trees of life along its banks, which were banned from being eaten after Adam and Eve had taken from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now that tree of life available to all.

So after a wonderful vision. Jesus says: Behold, I am coming soon. This is what he will do and bring.

A few verses later, again Jesus says: “Behold I am coming soon’... I Jesus have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches.’

So what is the response? “The Spirit and the bride say ‘Come’. And let him who hears say ‘Come’.” It is like John asks in that book. You see what will come? How do you respond?

Even the Holy Spirit calls for Jesus to come. The people of God want him to come.

A few lines later the Lord says again ‘Yes I am coming soon.’

The response of John – Amen. Come Lord Jesus!

You know when you read a book. The last pages stick with you. In fact it is the same with movies or a series on Netflix. That last episode. Or the ending of the film. It lingers in you.

When we read the last book of the Bible, its closing words. ‘Amen, Come Lord Jesus’.

Such words are to be part of our prayer life, as John records his prayer and the prayer of the Spirit. I find it incredible that if I have been reading through the Bible, the last words of Revelation, the ones I am to linger with: Jesus says ‘I am coming soon. John writes – for him for us all ‘Amen. Come Lord Jesus.’ What the Lord says - he will do. Our desire for him to come, our prayer for him to come.

## **2.Come down come in come among us**

A Church of England Minister, retired now, David Adam wrote this prayer:

“Come Lord, Come down, come in, come among us. Come as the wind to move us, come as the light to prove us, come as the night to rest us, come as the storm to test us, come as the sun to warm us, come as the stillness to calm us, come lord, come down, come in, come among us.”

This is a prayer for daily use. What does it mean when we pray for the Lord to come among us? Isaiah says ‘Oh’ and he goes on to say ‘come down that the mountains would tremble before you! As

when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you. For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down and the mountains trembled before you.'

The Prophet has in mind God's visitation recorded in Exodus. The mountain shook, there was fire. People trembled. Isaiah is not thinking about the Day of the Lord. He is praying for the Lord to come down, break into their situation now as a nation, as in the days of old. For his power and might to be shown.

Is that part of our praying? For situations of need, despair. Lord can you come down, come in, come among them? It is possible to think of national situations where this is so needed. Despite the celebrations around vaccines etc, it was shocking to read last week that the WHO worked out, every 17 seconds someone died of Coronavirus in Europe. When you do the maths of this service ... Lord we need you to come down, come in, come among us in our continent....

Israel needs Yahweh. **Yet all Israel may not feel it needs** Yahweh. Isaiah says – in well known words – even our good deeds, are like filthy rags before God. They are shrived up like an autumn leaf. Like chaff, we are swept away. So many do not call on God he says. Yet he – Isaiah - prays for God to come. Isaiah isn't waiting for some great revival to go through the nation and then make this prayer. He is crying out now. He may be one of the few in the nation.

That may well be part of our role. We can complain a bit. Maybe talk about the past when so many people went to church. Or how schools used to talk about faith. When the morals of the nation may have been better or more Christian we may say. Isaiah sees the problems in his nation. Yet he complains to God and prays.

Isaiah challenges us. Lord, we need you in this nation, come down, come in, come among us...

In some situations, what has been described as revival. Revival does not mean just changes of congregations – that could be described as renewal – but where the local communities are affected changed for the good. The last British revival was on the Island of Lewis. Post World War Two. People who talk about it, feel part of the foundations for that revival were connected to 6 elderly people who gathered to regularly pray for their isle when they saw all the struggles and pain on it...

So. Do we cry out for God to come down, come in, come among our nation.

The second thought. Isaiah is working with an expectation of what God **coming down will look like**. Like in Exodus. But when we pray for God to come, what do we expect? Advent like I said points us to Christ's first coming. And you know. That was pretty quiet wasn't it. I mean. Yes pretty dramatic for the shepherds. And the wise men knew. And Nazareth were unsettled by how Mary got pregnant – how much did Joseph tell them. But. When it all settled down. Jesus was the Word made flesh. Yet. He was making your table. He made your chairs. He stood in the rain as the rainy season came, he sat in a boat on the Galilee sea. He walked with his parents into Jerusalem. Yet nobody knew. Very few. Yet God was among us! Someone said, God has two speeds of acting – slowly and suddenly; to this, we can add quietly loud. You see, the Jews expected it to be dramatic when God would come, and when Messiah would come. Yet it was so different. So it makes me think. When I pray for the Lord to come. What do I expect him to do? Will I miss what he is doing? If I had been praying for the Messiah to come, like many were in the Days of Joseph and Mary, would I have looked at Jesus and said – he is just the carpenter?

## Finally identity.

To return to Lord's coming. Revelation as I said ends with 'Jesus says: I am coming soon. John writes: Amen. Come, Lord Jesus'. John's final words. "the grace of our Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen."

He has not come yet. It can be hard with disappointment. We need that grace of our Lord Jesus, as we wait, watch, and pray for his return. In all the delay, Isaiah, who in effect is asking 'how long - why don't you come?' he stands in his identity. He remembers the past acts of God. He has shared about his desire, he has been honest about their own sins, and then he says 'Yet - O Lord - despite our waiting, despite our sins and failures, there is hope - you are our Father. We are your children. We are valued. We will not be abandoned. We are the clay - being shaped by you - you are the potter. We are the work of your hand. He stands in his and their identity of who they are in God's eyes, as they stand in the inbetween times - how God had acted powerfully in the past and as Isaiah looks for God to do so again soon.

## Conclusion.

So as we pray for the Lord's return - at the end of time, as the Son of Man comes with clouds and the angels; while we pray for him to come down, come in and come among us, in our nation, our personal circumstances - we stand in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (we are forgiven, right with God through the blood of the Lamb), we stand in the unmerited favour and help of God to us; we stand in our identity - he is our Father, he is for us, not against us, we are his children, we are the clay but he is the loving potter who hasn't stopped working. We will remain faithful to him as he remains faithful to us in these days. Amen.